

Ballard Civic Center Park Community Meeting #3 Summary 3/9/04

Meeting purpose: To give the community an opportunity to review the staff recommended schematic design and to hear community ideas for park development and programs

For more information: <http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/parks/proparks/projects/BallardMunicipalCenterPark.htm>

About 250 community members participated in the third planning meeting for the park.

Meeting #2 summary (complete summary on park web site). About 150 community members participated in the second planning meeting on January 13. At the January 13 meeting the community reviewed 3 alternative designs. People asked for a more active park with pockets for peaceful contemplation, a park that is clean, safe, and attractive throughout the day and year round. The community reflected on the need for spaces for festivals and community gatherings, but had mixed feelings about skateboarders. On the one hand, a skateboard park element could provide a dynamic activity, making the park more active and secure. On the other hand, a skateboard park could have a negative impact in terms of noise and parking. In general, however, the community supported active zones, restrooms, skateboarding, and large open spaces. The community agreed the active and quiet areas should be separated.

Parks staff summarized the project background, schedule, and budget. The 2000 Pro Parks Levy provides \$2.47 million for project planning, design and construction of this new 1.38-acre urban park. The park will be constructed in 2005. The basis of the park design comes from the Ballard Civic Center Master Plan. Copies of the Master Plan were available at the meeting for review and are available at the Ballard Neighborhood Service Center and at: http://www.seattle.gov/realstate/bmc/bmc_master_plan.htm

Ballard High Chemistry teacher Jeff Cleaveland brought eight large models to the meeting of sustainable designs of the QFC and Park developments created by 150 of his students. Many of these students participated in the March 9 Park meeting and were on hand to explain their ideas.

Susan Golub of the Parks Superintendent's office was available to discuss plans to develop a new skateboard park in Lower Woodland Park and to encourage skateboarders to participate in a new Skateboard Advisory Committee. For more information contact Susan at 206-684-7046, or send an e-mail to susan.golub@seattle.gov

Barbara Swift and Lisa Corry of Swift & Company Landscape Architects presented the Park staff-recommended schematic design to the community. The design incorporated many of the community ideas from the second public meeting. The design can be reviewed on the park web page, is posted on the park sign, and is available at the Ballard Community Center, Neighborhood Service Center and Ballard Public Library. The consultants and Parks staff stationed themselves throughout the meeting room for one hour during the March 9 meeting so that they could answer questions and take community comments. Park staff reported back community comments and questions during the final half hour of the meeting. The community was asked to consider four questions as they reviewed the staff-recommended schematic design:

1. When will you and your family use this park?
2. What parts of the park do you think you will use most?
3. Where in the park will you sit? Where will you walk? Where will you play?
4. Does this park fit well into the Ballard neighborhood?

The following pages summarize community responses and provide answers to some frequently asked questions. Complete transcripts of community comments are posted on the project web page.

Design of the park

While some community members thought the design was “bland” and too corporate – “make it more Ballard, less Bellevue, more gritty and simple – Joe’s Coffee House, not Starbucks,” in general most people who commented on the design, commented favorably. Many community members wanted a skateboard bowl included in the design. (*See skateboard park comments below.*) Some commented negatively about the large number of trees and were concerned that trees would block the sun. At the same time others encouraged “more native plantings and habitat. We already have too much pavement and lawn in Ballard.” People wanted to be sure tables and benches were included. Other people asked for food kiosks.

QFC/Security Property development. The Ballard Municipal Center Master Plan strongly encourages residential development facing the new park. Some community members said that they didn’t “want QFC building to dictate what is happening in the park.” The QFC redevelopment project that borders the park’s western boundary is currently under review by the Seattle Department of Planning and Development. It is likely that a seven-story step-backed apartment building with more than 250 units will face on to the park. Some community members were concerned that the park might “feel like park in a canyon.” Parks designers have met only a few times with the QFC/Security developers but Park staff are pleased that the developers have been cooperative in sharing their design ideas and have provided constructive and positive responses to both active and passive park design elements.

Amphitheater. The community liked the amphitheater space but wanted to make sure it was “adaptable to many uses” and would not function as a skateboard area. Community members encouraged designers to learn more about theatrical needs in designing the amphitheater – sun angles, seat ‘rake’, and stage requirements. Some of the community raised concerns about making sure the amphitheater was not a “dead zone” but rather “a daily place to visit. Not just focus on festivals.”

Play area. The community had positive comments on the idea of artistic play area and rock/water play structures: “Love the natural stone forms and think kids will too.” There was interest in how rock sculptures would encourage play and accommodate children of various ages. Community encouraged Parks to make play areas safe. Parks follows a variety of safety reviews for any new park developments.

Bathrooms. A comfort station was not included in the staff-preferred schematic design. The typical community response was to “encourage the rethinking of a bathroom. If you want people to use it long a bathroom would be great. Libraries aren’t open nearly as many hours as Parks are.”

Parking. There was some community concern that parking would be limited to the perimeter of the park. “Ballard is zoned for high density and parking will be an issue in the future.” One reason that Park staff recommends a limited street skate plaza instead of a regionally attractive skateboard park for this location is because parking is a limiting factor. Keeping the bowl in this park would continue to make the new park a regional draw. People often travel to regional parks by car. The primary goal of the Ballard Municipal Center Master Plan is to encourage the development of a pedestrian-based urban village. The park development will remove a parking lot and add no parking.

Water features. Many community members continue to advocate for water features in the new park. Rain drums, swales and a children’s water play area are under consideration for the park rather than a more spectacular and high-maintenance water fountain. Some community continued to ask for the inclusion of a “calming, low maintenance water fountain. It can be done in spite of your cries of ‘maintenance anguish’.” Other community members questioned why water was needed “in a land locked park? Why? We’ve got water all around 24th St Pier, Golden Gardens, Carkeek, Lake Washington, Lake Union, Puget Sound. Why cram more water in 1.3 acres?” Still others worried that water would be used inappropriately for bathing and laundry.

Skateboard Park Elements

The staff-recommended schematic design includes a street skate plaza but not a bowl. Seattle Parks is moving forward to develop a regional skateboard park in Lower Woodland Park and other Seattle locations. Parks staff were on hand at the March 9 Ballard meeting to take skater comments about the design of the Woodland Park facility. Perhaps the most compelling reason Parks staff have used in making a recommendation to limit the skateboard park is that a large amount of residential property currently faces the park, and a great deal of new residential development is planned nearby. The Ballard Civic Center park will soon function as the front yard and only green space for hundreds of residents in one of the most dense urban villages in Seattle. While some urban dwellers would be delighted to pass by, hear, and see a constant buzz of park activity, many nearby existing residents have expressed concern about a constantly active skateboard park in this location. The open space demand on this small piece of property will only increase as the urban village develops.

Bowl users, street skaters and BMX. Some participants at the meeting said that street skaters represent a different demographic than bowl skaters and may have lower maintenance and public safety standards. “Bowl skaters police street skaters.” BMX use of skateboard parks was also a concern. The community wanted to be sure an expert skate design firm would be involved in developing any skate area for the park. The Parks sub-consultant for the skateboard plaza design is Grindline.

Love the skateboard park. Dozens of people expressed the following thought in a variety of ways, “I love that place. Me and my friends fought for it to be built in our neighborhood. Don’t take it away. Woodland Park is too far away.”

Skating uses a compact area. The community supported an active park and felt the bowl would be a good use of a space that “is too small for bicycle exercise, or rollerblades,” a “very sustainable small area that accommodates a lot of people.” Skating “is compact, serves an underserved age group, is graceful to watch, is sculpture and encourages activity. Otherwise try more activity for folks over 5 years old – basketball, tennis backboard, climbing wall, gym equipment that is sculptural.”

Cost of a new bowl. The Ballard bowl was created with money from Seattle Parks, the Neighborhood Matching Fund and community donations of money and labor. Many commented that “it would be wasteful to demolish a perfectly good skate park located in a perfectly situated location.” Parks staff appreciates the tremendous community energy that went into building this temporary structure but believes the bowl is not ideally situated. Cost estimates for demolishing and rebuilding the bowl are relatively small compared to the multi-million dollar investment the City has already made to purchase and develop this new park.

Seattle needs more skateboard parks. Many people at the meeting commented that Seattle has only one permanent skateboard park (at Seattle Center). We came “all the way from Bellingham – where families served 27yrs by skate parks. Seattle very underserved by skate parks.” Parks agrees and is actively working to develop new skate parks.

Skateboarding is good for your health. Community members commented that this sport encourages fitness and that “skateboarding is a non-competitive sport- healthy and communal.”

Skateboarding fosters a positive intergenerational community place. “I’m a 49 year old resident of Ballard. I have 3 sons and we all use the skate park and bowl. It would be a shame to remove this park from the future plans, especially the bowl. This bowl is unique – the older men have developed a place here where young and old come together unlike any other activity I know of. They mentor and encourage the youth. They treat my kids extremely well and we all thoroughly enjoy come here.”

Process excludes young people. Community was concerned that youth have a positive civic experience. “If we don’t include skate bowl gives negative message to kids who have been active in their community support.”

Community members against skateboard park were most concerned with noise and with turning a passive park into an active one. There were also comments about fast moving skateboarders spilling over into areas frequented by slow moving seniors. “Ballard absolutely needs a park in the center of the community. Ballard is fast becoming the largest apartment condo population in the city. This park should be just that—a park where people can walk, sit and read, relax and meet with fellow residents. Noisy skateboarders are not conducive to the quiet peaceful place we look to as citizens. The park should compliment our beautiful new library with a real park, not something for skateboarders because the majority of adults in Ballard will not use the park. Please, please develop a park for the majority of citizens – not just a vocal minority.”

Frequently asked community questions

- 1. Is this the final design?** What was presented at the March 9 meeting is a Park staff-recommended schematic design. The Board of Park Commissioners will make a recommendation on the park design on May 13. Following the Park Board recommendation, the Park Superintendent will make a final decision on the design of the park. See “Next Steps” below for details.
- 2. Who selected this design?** Parks development staff made the recommendation of this schematic design based on input from community meetings, community comments, Park maintenance and operations staff, the Seattle Design Commission, and meetings with other community groups such as the Ballard Civic Center Steering Committee.
- 3. How many people can fit in each of these options?** A basic requirement of the Ballard Civic Center Master Plan is for a park that can accommodate Ballard’s frequent community festivals and events. Seating for 175-300 in an amphitheater-like setting, and capacity within the park for festivals with vendors and 600-900 people.
- 4. What kind of shadows will be cast on the park after the surrounding buildings are built up?** The Security-QFC redevelopment project to the west can be built up to 74-feet. Properties to the north and south of the park can be built to 60- and 65-feet. We are working with the Security/QFC developers to maximize sunlight and the landscape architect will focus more active areas where there is less shade.
- 5. How much will it cost to demolish the Safeway and skateboard park?** Contractor costs for demolishing the old Safeway and parking lot are about \$215,000. Parks estimates it will cost less than \$10,000 to remove the skateboard bowl.
- 6. How is park linked to Community Center?** The park will open towards the Ballard Civic Center, including the Ballard Library and Neighborhood Service Center across the street. The Community Center is several blocks to the west, and may use the new park for community programs and events.
- 7. What are swales and rain drums?** Swales are depressed channels carefully placed to slow down the rapid flow of stormwater runoff by ponding water between sloping sides. By letting the water pond, swales also treat the water before it goes to the stormwater system. Rain drums interact with rainwater that is slowly released on to drumheads to create a pleasant environmental sound. The swale and rain drums will be primarily located in the northwest corner of the park site.

Next steps

The Board of Park Commissioners will hold a public hearing on the staff-recommended schematic design on April 8 at 6 p.m. at the South Lake Union Armory building at 860 Terry Avenue North. The Board will use public comments, plus those they receive up until May 13, to help them to develop a recommendation to Superintendent Ken Bounds that they will reach at their May 13 meeting. The Superintendent will then make a final decision on the design of the park. If you want to submit written comments to the Park Board, please send them by May 13, 2004, to Sandy Brooks, Seattle Parks and Recreation, 100 Dexter Avenue N, Seattle 98109. e-mail sandy.brooks@seattle.gov, (206) 684-5066
<http://www.cityofseattle.net/parks/parkboard/comments.htm>

Please contact Cathy Tuttle with any questions or comments on the Ballard Civic Center park at (206) 684-7033 cathy.tuttle@seattle.gov Seattle Parks and Recreation, 800 Maynard Avenue South #300, Seattle 98134.